

# Ohio

## Rural Life Survey

### "Church Growth and Decline in Ohio"



DIRECTED BY

The Department of Church and Country Life

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Ohio rural life survey

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# Ohio Rural Life Survey

## "Church Growth and Decline in Ohio"



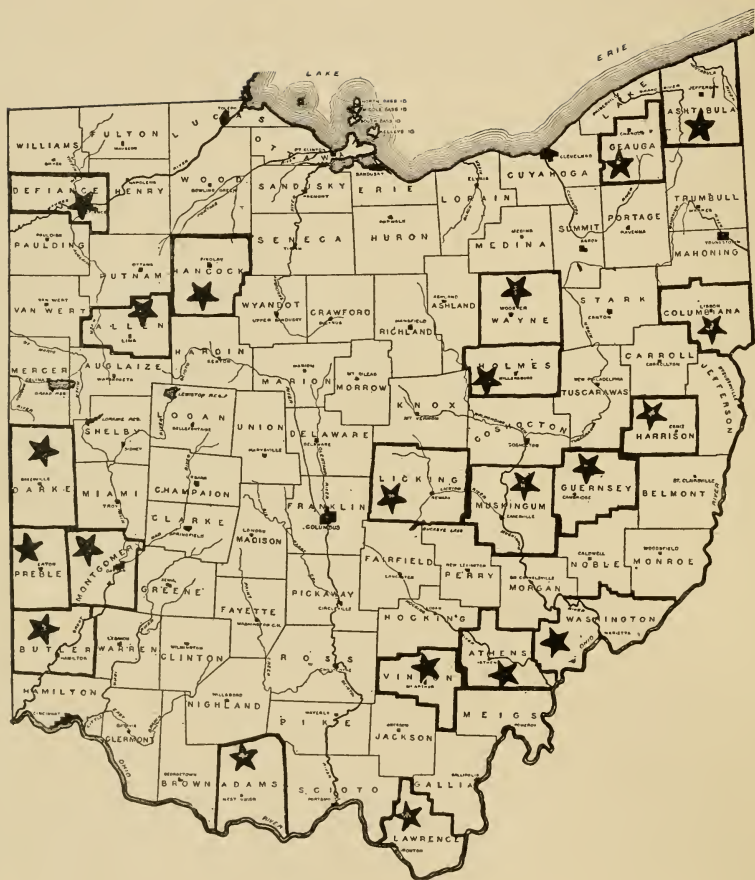
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PRESBYTERIAN DEPARTMENT OF CHURCH AND  
COUNTRY LIFE

156 Fifth Avenue, New York City



MAP OF OHIO. THE COUNTIES SURVEYED ARE INDICATED BY A STAR.

## Church Growth and Decline in Ohio

This report embodies some of the results of the Ohio Rural Life Survey, the work of which was carried on during the summer of 1912 in twenty-one (21) counties of that State. This study included in its scope all social forces and social institutions. But one specific aspect of this general inquiry is presented here, namely—the question of church efficiency, or, rather of the ability and equipment of the rural church to render efficient service.

The best measure of church efficiency in these districts where agriculture and, consequently, rural society are relatively matured is the attitude of society towards the church as an institution. This attitude is most clearly indicated by the support which society gives the church. In any reasonably stable population the church which is rendering an efficient and indispensable service will, in the average instance, be maintained and adequately supported. We shall, therefore, consider primarily the question of church growth.

There is an easy assumption among many whose knowledge is more general than precise, that the church is everywhere doing well. Those who are genuinely concerned for its welfare often feel that it is their duty to contend that the church is successful. The purpose of this report, however, is analysis and not argument. It presents the results of a critical and scientific investigation of the religious conditions of rural Ohio which was made, not for the support of any particular proposition, but simply to ascertain the exact facts. The investigation was made and the results are here presented in a spirit of entire sympathy and for the sole purpose of pointing out the way of betterment. The criticism is meant to be essentially constructive. The discussion is of average conditions. There are many specific instances which will contradict the principles here laid down. Such specific instances strengthen rather than invalidate our conclusions.

The territory covered by this report includes nineteen of the twenty-one counties surveyed. All of the counties starred on the map of Ohio (see frontispiece), except Montgomery and Preble counties, are considered. Preble County was omitted, because only a part of it was



surveyed, and Montgomery County, because the work there was done on a slightly different basis and the results could not be unified with the results for the remaining nineteen counties. The counties under consideration, then, are Ashtabula and Geauga, in the Western Reserve; Allen, Hancock and Defiance, in the fertile Maumee Valley section; Butler and Darke, in the Miami Valley; Adams, Lawrence, Washington and Athens, on the Ohio River, and Vinton, Guernsey, Muskingum, Licking, Harrison, Holmes, Wayne and Columbiana, in the East Central part of the State. All parts of these counties are included, with the exception of towns having a population of more than 2,500. We have here represented practically every type of agricultural condition to be found within the State. There are counties containing some of the richest and most highly priced farming land in the State, and others containing some of the cheapest and poorest land; there are level counties and hilly counties; there are counties which show the influence of neighboring large cities and counties which are as strictly rural as any in the State. In all, this territory contains 10,602 square miles, a little more than one-fourth of the total land area of the State. Any conclusions established for these nineteen counties will be representative of the conditions throughout the State as a whole.

Since farm life and village life show such marked differences in their economic and social conditions, a point which requires no argument, they show different tendencies in their religious conditions. The relation between the village and the surrounding country, and consequently between village institutions and country people, is by no means uniform throughout the State. This relation is, in some instances, much closer than in others, so that whereas one village or one village church may be essentially a rural institution, another may be controlled by influences quite alien to rural life. We have, therefore, divided the churches on a three-fold basis to bring out the contrasts involved.

Certain terms will be used throughout the discussion. All churches which are located in towns or villages and which minister primarily to a town or village population, which have, that is to say, from 25% to 100% of their members living within corporation limits, we have designated "town" churches. All churches located in towns or villages which minister largely to a farming population, which have from 25% to 100% of their members living on farms, we have designated "town-country" churches. The term "country" we have reserved for those churches which are located in the open country.

Throughout this discussion one of the difficulties will be to distinguish between cause and effect. We will not attempt in all cases to do so.

Very frequently a condition which is a result of church decline will itself become an important cause of further decline. It is hard to know where to draw the line.

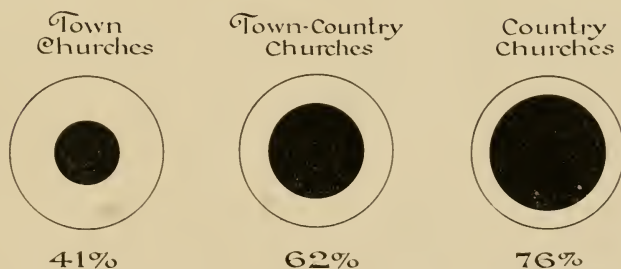
## OUTLINE OF CONDITIONS

In these nineteen counties there are in all 1,515 churches. Forty-six per cent. of these are located in towns or villages and the remainder in the open country. A comparatively small proportion of the village churches exist for the sake of village people only. The majority serve country people also. Twelve per cent. of the total number of churches may be termed "town," and 32% "town-country." By far the larger number of these churches, therefore, minister wholly, or in large measure, to the farming population.

The average number of churches per county is about eighty. Some counties, however, are much more plentifully supplied than others. Certain other variations in this respect are exceedingly interesting and significant. In general, we may say that in the level counties, which in this case are the richer counties, the limits of the average rural community are more widely extended, the relation to the town is closer and the country districts have less feeling of being cut off from village

# The Passing of the farmers Church.

## 1288 Churches.



## are not Growing.

19 Counties

Ohio Rural Life Survey

life. In the hilly counties the country communities are smaller in extent and apparently much more conscious of themselves. Their relation to the town, particularly in the outlying districts, is relatively slight. The result is that in these hilly counties there are, on an average, many more country churches than in the level counties. For example: Washington County has 74 country churches; Vinton has 51; Athens, 63; Lawrence, 62; Licking, 57; while Holmes has but 30; Butler, 10; Darke, 36; Defiance, 27, and Ashtabula, a very large county, 48. This places the poorer counties at an initial disadvantage. While less able to support churches, they have more to support.

Of all these 1,515 churches at the present time slightly less than one-third are growing. The remaining two-thirds have either ceased to grow or are dying. This, at the outset, would seem to raise a serious question of church efficiency, especially when we must also remember a somewhat long list of churches which in time past have flourished, but which have now been abandoned. These churches average about ten to the county, there being, we estimate, something like 800 in the entire State. These are churches whose doors and windows have been nailed shut and which will never again be used for religious purposes. A few of them have been taken over for various other purposes; homes, tool sheds or barns. Most of them, however, still stand unused, crumbling monuments to the wasteful individualism of the past. These general statements, though in themselves strongly indicative of church decline, tell but a small part of the story.

The decline of the farmer's church is the most striking single fact to be recorded. Those churches upon which the farming population is dependent show the most rapid changes and the most marked signs of decadence. Of the churches which we have designated "town" churches, approximately six out of ten are growing. This is a fair proportion. Various causes have combined in the past to put into almost every town more churches than are needed, and more churches than can prosper there. A weeding-out process has been going on. The result will be to the ultimate advantage of those churches which survive.

### ENTER THE FARMER!

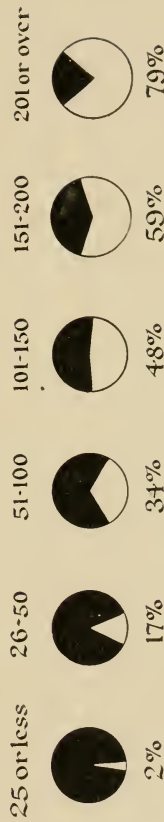
Of the churches which we have designated "town-country" churches, 38% are growing, 38% as compared with 59% of the "town" churches. Of the "country" churches, by far the larger number of all the churches considered, not quite one-fourth are growing. The study of county after county compels the conclusion that when other things



# The Survival of the Fittest.

One way in which Natural Selection is solving the problem of Over-Churching

Churches with a membership of



are Growing.

The large Church is the more efficient working Force  
Small, weak churches would fare better if combined.

19 Counties.

Ohio Rural Life Survey.

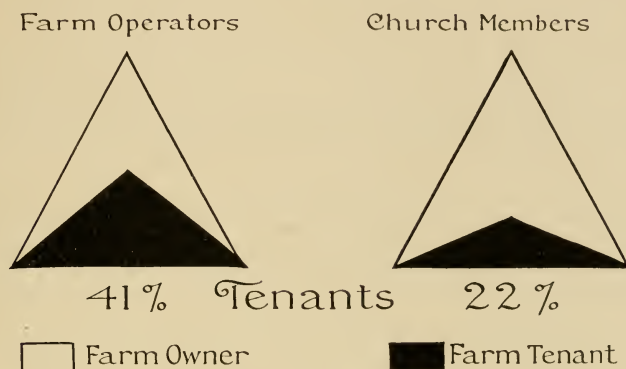
are equal, the larger the proportion of farmers in the membership of a church, the smaller chance does that church have to maintain itself with its strength unimpaired. The farmer is to-day our most difficult church problem. Moving his church to town does not solve the problem as far as he is concerned, and puts an added strain upon the townsfolk, for here it seems the townsfolk are carrying the farmers and doing it none too well.

Probably many explanations of this condition might be advanced. Doubtless the least correct of them would be that the farmer is not a religious man. He *is* naturally religious and has shown himself to be a faithful supporter of the church, according to his light and his means. In certain sections where the churches show the greatest signs of distress, it is the testimony of those who know, that the people are genuinely religious and genuinely concerned for the affairs of religion. Yet the churches have suffered. In only one county in the State can it be said that the churches, over any large area, have suffered primarily because of the *indifference* of the people.

Many factors must be considered in determining the cause of this. The church, as an organization, is highly sensitive to all changes which affect the society supporting it. Various changes in the conditions of country life during the last few decades have seriously conditioned the problem of the church. The most obvious of these changes has been the shift in population. In practically every county in the State, even where the total population has increased, the population of the farms and of the small villages has decreased. This is true of the rich, fertile counties, and is even more true of the poorer counties. For example: In Butler, Preble, Darke and Montgomery counties the population of the large cities more than doubled between 1880 to 1910. The population of the towns showed a smaller, but still substantial, increase. The rural districts, however, showed a net loss. Vinton County, on the other hand, lost more than a third of its population during the same thirty years. We need not here enter into any discussion of the causes of this decrease. Obviously, however, it makes a problem for the country church, in which the town churches do not share. It is difficult to maintain a church in a decreasing population.

Certain pronounced changes in agricultural conditions have also had marked effects. In this State throughout the better farming sections tenantry on the farms has increased rapidly. The renter follows the good land. Through the counties in the Miami Valley from 40% to 50% of the farms are operated by tenants, and in all other sections of the State where farming is relatively prosperous

# Country Churches and the Tenant Farmer



A Church for the Farm Owner,  
or a Church for all who farm.

Butler County  
Ohio Rural Life Survey.

tenant farmers are now a considerable proportion of the population of the rural districts. It is no reflection upon the tenant farmer to say that the church has not yet learned how to reach him. The proportion of tenants to owners in the church membership is seldom as high as the proportion in the total farming population. Butler County is an instance of this. Here 41% of the operating farmers on the land are tenants, but only 22% of the operating farmers on the church roll are tenants. A similar condition prevails throughout the State. The church has a slighter hold upon the renter, and it makes slower progress with him than with the land holder. One reason for this appears when we study the question of the stability of the farming population. A house-to-house canvass of three townships in Butler and Preble

counties showed that while the average term of occupancy for any given farm is for the farm owner approximately 15 years, for the tenant farmer it is but 4.5 years. There are sections, of course, in which the tenant farmer is a relatively permanent resident. In general he belongs to the shifting element in the population, and for that reason he is not a real part of any given community and is less inclined to support its institutions. To have an ever-increasing proportion of the population members of a class upon whom the church has as yet no hold, means that the influence of the church must be exerted within ever narrowing limits.

The question of farm income is also of importance here. Careful studies were made of the income of farmers in certain representative sections of the State. These studies showed that there is a large proportion of the farming population without an adequate income. After paying out necessary living expenses they have nothing left for the support of social institutions. An institution like the church must be supported out of the community's profits. Where any considerable proportion of the population have no profits, or where the profits are diminishing, its position will become continuously a more perilous one. Doubtless these outward conditions have been among the causes which have occasioned the decline of the farmer's church.

Many churches, however, have shown that it is not necessary for a church to fail, even in the face of such conditions as these. These

# Stability of Farming Population

496 Farm Operators.

The average term of occupancy

<input type="checkbox"/>	for tenants is 4.5 years
<input type="checkbox"/>	for owners is 14.9 years.

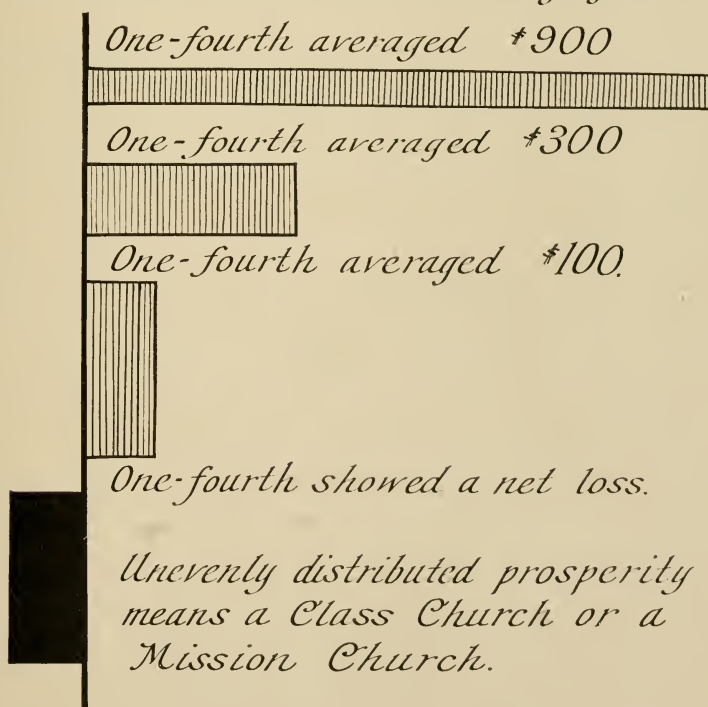
One Reason why the Church has  
no hold on the Tenant Farmer.

Butler & Preble Counties— Ohio Rural Life Survey

conditions make the problem of maintenance and survival more acute. The church to survive must put forth special effort. The church will thus survive through the methods of church work and administration. There seems to be no reason why the church, if properly administered, should not keep its people in the country, make their life there more pleasant and more profitable and reach and hold the tenant farmer when he comes into its neighborhood. The methods of church work which now have vogue in the country are not adequate to the needs of the field. In some respects these methods have been carried over from a

## Getting an Income from the Farm.

*Showing the distribution of income among a representative group of farmers:- net profit above all farm and household expenses for an average year.*



Wayne Co.      *Ohio Rural Life Survey.*



day when conditions were quite different. In other respects there has been an attempt to transplant the methods of the town church to the country. The attempt to meet rural problems with town methods and modern problems with pioneer methods has been one of the causes compelling the country churches to face the bare problem of survival. Most country churches devote all their available energy to the mere task of keeping themselves alive and none is left for the consideration of the problem of an increased efficiency.

## METHODS OF CHURCH ADMINISTRATION AND WORK

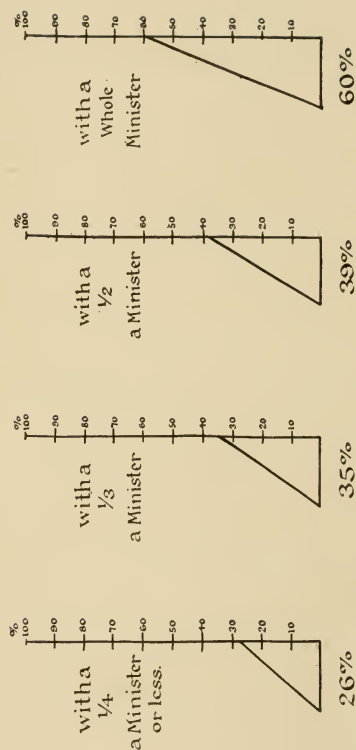
From the point of view of business efficiency the church in the country lacks adequate supervision and direction. There are few kinds of businesses which will run themselves without trained personal supervision, and the church is not one of these. The church is an enterprise which requires constant care. The minister is the man in whom the responsibility for this care is vested. The efficiency of the church will depend largely upon whether his ability and his opportunity are equal to his task.

The first charge against country churches is the charge of ministerial vivisection. It consists essentially in dividing up a minister between two or more different charges and compelling him to attempt to do in several different places work which requires his constant attention in each place. This is a crime not only against the minister, but against the church itself.

The town churches do not offend seriously in this regard. 37% of these churches have undivided ministers, while another 32% have one-half a minister each. This leaves less than one-third of the churches forced to content themselves with one-third of a minister or less. The "town-country" churches are not quite so favorably situated but they still remain reasonably well within the bounds of propriety. 18% have undivided ministers and 34% have each one-half a minister and 23% each one-third. It is the "country" churches which are the serious offenders. Just 6% of all the country churches have undivided ministers and only 26% have as large a part of the minister as one-half. 23% have only one-third of a minister, 27% have only one-fourth, 14% have only one-fifth, 5% have only one-sixth, while one poor minister was found who was manfully striving to serve the needs of seven different churches scattered all over a county. In 123 consecutive days he had preached 119 times, in a vain effort to fill a place seven times too large for one man.

# Ministerial Vivisection and The Growth of Churches.

1190 churches.



## are Growing.

*It is hard for a part of a man to do a whole man's work.*  
19 Counties.  
Ohio Rural Life Survey.

Certain denominations which have as ministers of their churches men who are regularly members of their communities as farmers, blacksmiths, etc., provide a fair proportion of their country churches with undivided ministers. Those denominations, however, which have a professional ministry, have made a settled policy of combining the country churches on circuits of from two churches up. There still remains in some sections an outworn notion that it does not require a whole minister to direct a country church, that the work of a country church is easier than the work of a town or city church. This notion is gradually being shocked out of us and we are discovering how hard it is to succeed, and how easy it is to fail in the country field.

Columbiana County, with nine country churches having ministers on full time, has more than twice as many churches in this condition as any other county surveyed. There are seven counties without a single professional minister serving a country church on full time and seven others which have but one or two. In Vinton County all but four country churches have less than a third of a minister each, and in some of the river counties conditions are almost as bad.

A whole minister has a big enough task to keep a church alive, particularly in the country, as the records well show; a fraction of a minister has an infinitely more difficult task. The connection of the churches on a circuit is an important factor. Where the churches are so located that their respective parishes are practically contiguous, making one large parish with several preaching points, this system does not have such ill results. Where the churches are so located that their parishes are quite distinct and a considerable amount of travel is necessary to go from one to the other, the situation is more serious. In either event, however, the effect of this systematized vivisection upon church growth is unmistakable. Of all the churches with a whole minister each, 60% are growing. The few country churches that come in this class make as good a showing as the town churches. Six times out of ten the minister who can give his entire attention to one church succeeds in making it prosper. Probably this is as high a per cent. of efficiency as any profession can show. Of the half a minister churches only 39% are growing. Of the third of a minister churches only 35% are growing, while of those churches which have one-fourth of a minister or less 26% are growing. Some churches have greater inherent strength than others. Some are more fortunate in the ministrations accorded them. These are the exceptions that prove the rule that it is bad business in the average instance to send a part of a man to do a whole man's work.

Of course, the objection is at once urged that most of these churches could not afford ministers at all, unless they were combined on circuits; a question into which we cannot go more fully at this point. Occasionally we are told, apropos of this acknowledged difficulty, that the country minister ought to follow the example of the Apostle Paul and learn a trade, that he might not be a burden to his congregation. But to divide a minister up between two professions seems to be a worse policy than to divide him up between two churches. A sufficient number of instances of this were found to show the tendencies. Among certain sects, where the social bond is a common religion and where there is more than the ordinary amount of solidarity and class consciousness, as with the Amish and Mennonites, this policy of self-supporting ministers proves very satisfactory. In most other instances the attempt to make the minister into a tradesman spells failure.

There is another angle to this question which shows quite as clearly the relation of the minister to the problem of church growth. It is obvious that when a minister is, for example, divided up amongst four churches, the one of these churches near which he elects to live has a resident pastor. The other three have each a non-resident minister. In the event of those circuits mentioned above, where the field is practically a contiguous one, this is not a very serious distinction. On the majority of circuits, however, the difference between the resident pastor and the non-resident minister is very marked, and very important. Living near his job is by no means unessential for the minister. It assures an opportunity to gain acquaintance with his problem and such intimate acquaintance is an asset in any line of work. The man who works a farm by not going near it, save at infrequent intervals, is not likely to realize very heavily upon it. Absentee landlordism is recognized as one of the prolific sources of agricultural decline. A church is no easier to work than a farm. It does not respond any more readily to absent treatment. The "two hour a month" minister cannot hope for an acquaintance with his people which will permit him to address himself intelligently to their peculiar local problems, and his ignorance regarding these problems will necessarily hamper him in his work.

Ministers seem to prefer the towns to the country. Most country ministers have also one town or village charge and elect to live in the town. Of all "town" churches 69% have resident pastors, 24% have non-resident, while 7% are without ministers. The "town-country" churches make almost as good a showing, 56% have resident pastors, 42% non-resident ministers and 6% no ministers. It is in the country that the minister is noticeably absent. Here where there are most of the churches there are fewest of the ministers. Only 13% of the

"country" churches have resident pastors, 73% have non-resident ministers, while 14% are without ministers. As a matter of fact these figures make the situation seem better than it actually is. One-third of those churches with a resident pastor have him for their minister on Sundays only and during the week for their blacksmith, or their jeweler, or their neighboring farmer. Another one-third have their minister only part of the time since he also serves one or more other churches. Just 4% of all "country" churches have resident pastors who serve one charge each on full time. The per cent. of absentee landlords was never known to be so high as this, 96% of the country churches ministered to at long range. The three maps on pages 18 and 19 show the relation between the points where the ministers preach and their places of residence. Two of the three counties shown are among the better organized counties.

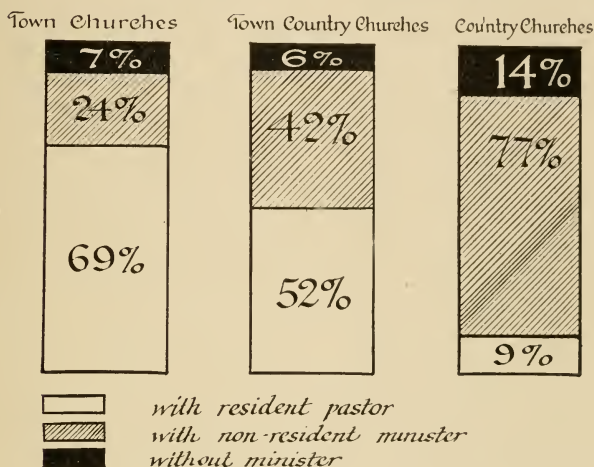
There is little of personal work about these country churches. In six out of every ten townships throughout these nineteen counties there is no minister living in the country districts. The ministers who preach in these townships live in the towns. Few townships, however many churches they may have, have more than one or two professional ministers living in the country. Strange to say those counties which have the most country churches have the fewest ministers living with them. Adams, Lawrence, Athens, Washington and Vinton counties have 303 country churches with but thirteen ministers living in the country. These same counties have an unusual number of churches without ministers; 61 in all. Washington County alone has twenty-three country churches without ministers.

What is obviously lacking in these churches is the minister who belongs to the country rather than to the town, who lives in it, who speaks its language, who understands it and who is especially trained to work in it according to its exact needs. Long distance ministering is inadequate ministering and in the long run unsuccessful ministering. Here again the effect upon church growth is clear and cannot be mistaken. Of all the churches which have resident pastors 51.3% are growing, and this in spite of the fact that most of these resident pastors have also to attend one or more churches aside from the ones near which they live. Of those churches which have non-resident ministers 26.3% are growing, while of the ministerless churches only 11% are growing. The margin of difference here is too great to be accidental, especially when this condition holds through town and country; through good farm areas and bad. The conclusion cannot be escaped that a few ministers who live in the country where they preach will be of



# Ministering to the Farmer at Long Range

1436 Churches



3 out of 10 farms have absentee Landlords,  
 9 " " 10 churches have absentee Ministers  
 or none at all

## Is a church easier to work than a farm?

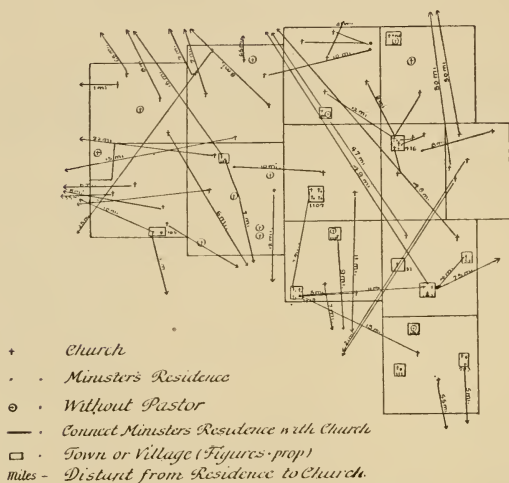
19 Counties      Ohio Rural Life Survey  
 Presbyterian Dept of Church and Country Life

vastly more service to it than a whole host who live elsewhere and merely preach there.

One obvious result of this system of farming out churches on circuits and giving to each church a small piece of a minister, and that, too, usually an absentee minister, is the great difficulty of supplying these churches with the ordinary pastoral ministrations. The public preaching service is an instance of this. A minister who has four or five churches cannot be expected to preach in each of them on every Sunday. It will be accepted without argument that the life of a church is vitally

# Where the Ministers Live and Where They Preach.

Vinton Co., Ohio.

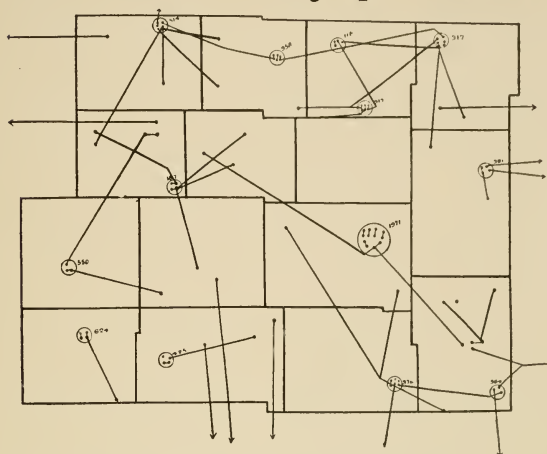


## OHIO Rural Life Survey.

related to the frequency of its public preaching services. Such public services are an important part of the work of any church. A large part of the "town" and "town-country" churches have service every Sunday; 65% in one instance, and 48% in the other. 25% of the remaining number of "town" churches and 37% of the "town-country" churches have two services a month. A very small proportion are without any regular service. In the country churches, however, only extreme. For example: in Adams, Lawrence, Athens, Washington and Vinton counties there are but twelve country churches which have a public service every Sunday and there are ninety-two which have services not oftener than once a month.

The frequency and regularity of service while perhaps not in itself so evident a cause of church growth, is nevertheless a rather clear index of it. Of all churches which have four services per month 47% are growing. Of those which have but two services 27% are growing. Of the one service a month churches 21% are growing, while of all those which have no regular service less than 4% are growing. There 21% have services every Sunday, more than one-half have but two

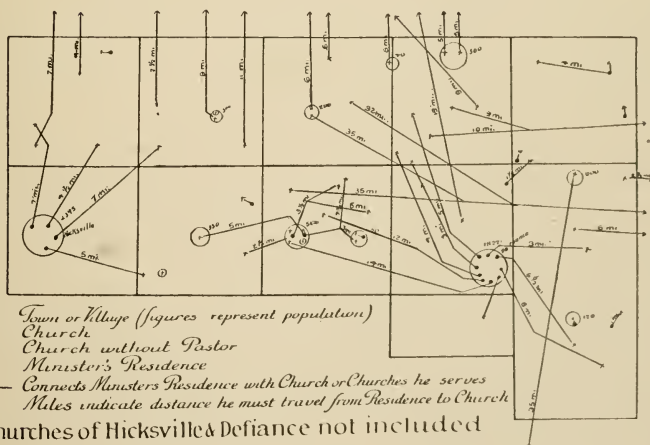
# Where the Ministers Live and where they preach.



Harrison Co. Ohio.

- Town or Village
- Church
- ⊕ Church without Pastor
- Minister's Residence
- Connects Ministers residence with Church he serves
- Figures represent population (1910)

# Where the Ministers Live & Where they Preach. Defiance Co. — Ohio.



- Town or Village (figures represent population)
  - Church
  - ⊕ Church without Pastor
  - Minister's Residence
  - Connects Ministers Residence with Church or Churches he serves
  - Miles indicate distance he must travel from Residence to Church
- Churches of Hicksville & Defiance not included

services monthly, 14% have but one, while 7% have no regular service. Of course the situation is the least favorable, as regards public services, in those counties which have carried the circuit system to the greatest is more of effect than cause here and yet this is important, for the opportunity to publicly assemble the people together is an opportunity whose importance to the church can hardly be over-estimated.

Another instance of the difficulty of supplying circuit churches with pastoral ministrations comes to light when dealing with the problem of how to induce people who are not church members to attach themselves to the church. Obviously the church which is not winning for itself new members is digging its own grave. This is particularly true in neighborhoods where there is very much shifting of the population. The lack of ministers residing in the country has caused a general reliance upon one single method of recruiting the church roll. This is the annual revival. The town and village churches use the revival as extensively as the country churches, but our present concern is with its efficiency for the country church. The figures are available for but sixteen of the nineteen counties which we have been considering. 645 country churches in these sixteen counties during the last church year added to their rolls 3,672 names. 454 of these churches sometime during the year held protracted revival services. These 454 churches had altogether 3,059 of the entire 3,672 additions. Of this number 3,011 were converts at revival services. These churches added but 48 to their rolls by other means. The average additions per church for these churches were 6.7. There were 191 churches in the country which did not have protracted meetings. 127 of these had no additions on confession. The whole number of churches had altogether 613 additions, an average of 3.2 per church. Most of these, however, came to a small number of churches, exceptionally well equipped. The few churches which had resident pastors doing a great amount of pastoral work showed a much larger average number of additions than the churches which depended upon the revival service.

This condition prevails generally throughout the State, but is seen at its extreme in those sections where the circuit system is carried to the extreme. It may also be said that in these counties the type of religious experience most common contains a greater element of emotionalism than is to be found in other sections. This emotionalism, of course, lends itself very readily to the revival system. As a result in many churches in these counties it is necessary in ascertaining the size of the membership to go over the roll carefully and discover how many times the same name is found thereon, placed there periodically after the annual gathering in.

We are not here contending for or against the revival as a method of church work. We simply desire to make certain facts clear. First, it is seen that the country churches, as a rule, are relying almost entirely upon the revival to increase their membership. Second, for more than three-fourths of the churches this reliance is proving quite inadequate, since it will be recalled that just 24% of the "country" churches are growing. The "town" and "town-country" churches show better results. The point of this seems very clear. The revival in those churches comes to supplement the work of a resident pastor. We are comparing here the revival as a *supplement* to the pastor's work, with the revival as a *substitute* for the pastor's work. As a supplement it is producing good results; as a substitute it is failing signally.

## SIZE AND EFFICIENCY

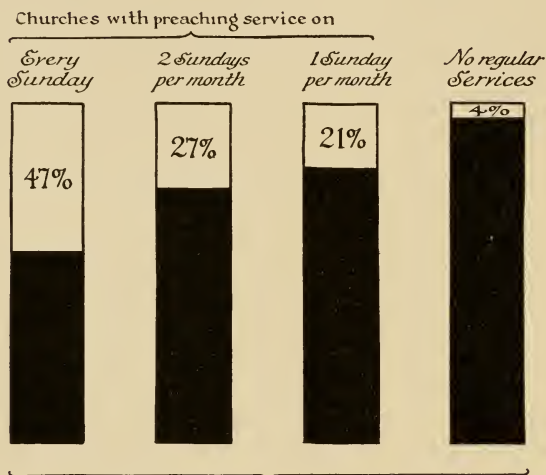
The size of the membership of a church has a bearing upon its working efficiency too direct and important to permit us to neglect it here. There has been a great tendency in the country to multiply churches and denominations far beyond the number needed. This tendency is seen in the towns and villages, but its effects are not so clearly marked there. There are more churches in the country in proportion to the population than there are in the towns and villages, and especially there are more small and weak churches. A study of the chart, "Variations in Size of Membership," will make clear this point. Of the "town" churches only 8.7% have less than 25 members each, while 59.1% have over 100 members each. The "town-country" churches average a little smaller; but 43.1% have over 100 members. 83% of all country churches, however, have less than 100 members each, while 21.2% have each 25 members or less.

Here we see in its clearest form the effects of strong denominational feeling upon church work. In the towns the multiplication of denominations while often highly criminal from the point of view of church efficiency, is not so easily carried to an extreme. This, of course, is for the very obvious reason that there is a large number of people within an easy church-going radius upon whom these churches may draw. In the country the people are more scattered and multiplication of churches and denominations means the dividing up of a clientele with very definite limits. Many churches were found which had a mere handful of members, sometimes but two or three, who were holding on to the old church long after some other church had come to fill the largest place in the religious life of the neighborhood, a policy which has very serious results. The impact of a small church upon society is



# The relation of Public Services to Church Growth.

1217 Churches.



## Are Growing.

*Another Problem for "the two-hour-a-month" minister*

19 Counties.

Ohio Rural Life Survey.

necessarily slight. There is a momentum to large numbers. "He that hath to him shall be given."

We may indicate this by dividing the churches up into six groups according to the size of their membership, and giving the statistics of growth for each. These groups will be as follows: churches with a membership of 25 or less, 26 to 50, 51 to 100, 101 to 150, 151 to 200, and 201 and over. In each of these groups there are included from 100 to 400 churches, enough to show clearly the tendencies. The percentages of growing churches, within each of these groups in the order given, are as follows: 2.2%, 16.6%, 33.5%, 48.2%, 58.5% and 79%. The regularity with which the increase of efficiency and ability to survive parallels the increase in membership is very striking. Obviously the great over-multiplication of small churches is one of the root causes of the

failure of the country churches to meet the conditions which we have previously mentioned as affecting church efficiency. They are unable to provide themselves with resident pastors who shall give them full service. They are unable to hold weekly public meetings. They are unable adequately to equip themselves for the work they must do.

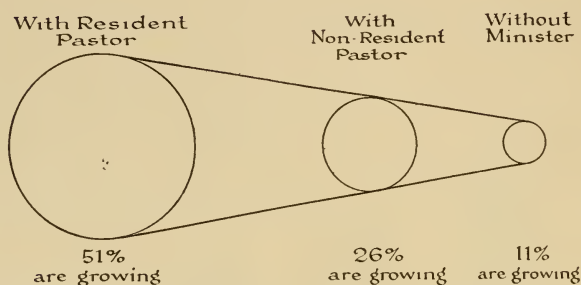
The conclusion is unavoidable that the small church is a dying proposition. It must be remembered that we are here dealing with a mature population. These are not frontier conditions, where population may be expected to increase rapidly and where all building is done with an eye to an expanded future. In these neighborhoods the population has already begun to decrease. The small church here in those districts which are already adequately churchied is not a promising missionary enterprise. Not until a church has at least 100 members does it have an even chance to survive.

There are two other serious results of this. The first is the economic waste. There are vastly more churches in the country districts than are needed to minister to all the people who live there and very few of these churches are equipped to bear their just share of the burden of religious work. Nearly every county has townships which furnish examples of this evil at its maximum. Here we have, let us say, a township in which there are five country churches. Two of them have each one-third of a minister and the remaining three have each a fourth. These ministers live from five to twenty miles away from these particular churches. Each minister travels a considerable distance to reach the one of these churches which he serves once or twice a month. He stays perhaps three days at each visit. He cannot be easily reached by his people at other times when he is specially needed. These men are working under very serious handicaps. All of them together do not give to this particular township an amount of time equal to the full time of one resident minister. The result is relative inefficiency. It would not cost as much to put in each of these communities one strong church with a resident pastor serving it on full time, who would be able to do far more than the whole number of ministers who can each spend but a small part of the time with each church. A fourth of each of four ministers does not mean a whole minister in working efficiency, though it means a whole salary. Here is a duplication of effort which from the point of view of parish economy is wasteful in the extreme.

This wastefulness, serious as it is when the churches everywhere complain of their poverty, might be overlooked if we could leave out of sight the fact that as a result of this system we have inefficient churches. But we cannot neglect the fact that this extravagant system does not get results. It can be shown from county after county

# The Failure of Absent Treatment

## 1135 Churches



19 Counties.

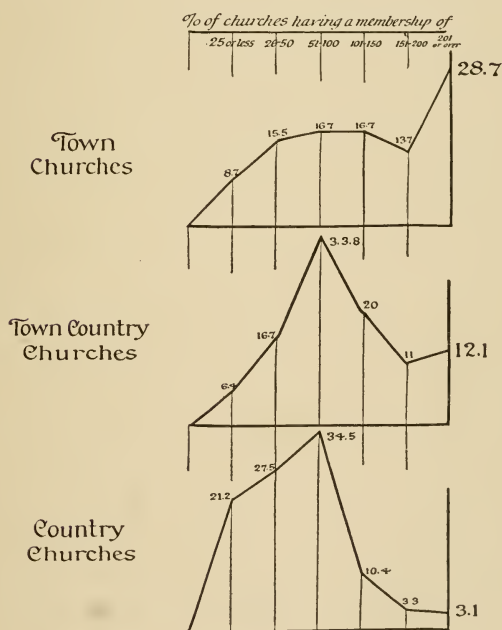
Ohio Rural Life Survey.

that those neighborhoods in which there are a large number of small, poorly equipped churches are responding the least readily to the influence of those churches. The religious forces are in those cases so divided that their impact upon society is almost negligible. Communities with a large number of weak churches as a general rule show a smaller proportion of their population in the church membership. In the average Ohio county one church to every 500 or 600 of the population gives an ample number, provided that those churches are properly equipped and maintained. We may take Ashtabula County as an example. Here there are five townships which have one church to approximately every 175 of the total farming population. These five townships show an average of 17% of their population in the church membership. Six townships have one church to every 250 and show 21% of the population as church members. Eight townships have one church to every 350 and show 24% as church members. Four townships have one to every 450 and show 26% members. Then there are four townships which have not churches enough. In these there is one church to from 700 to 1,300 of the population and but 11% of the population are church members. These figures could be duplicated for other communities. Over-churching is not only a matter of having more churches than are needed, but of having more than can be so equipped and maintained as to do the work properly and efficiently. Geauga and Defiance counties are the only counties surveyed which do not show clearly the serious effects of over-churching.

## THE RELATION OF GOOD CHURCHES AND GOOD FARMS

The last point to be made by this report, in some respects the most important point of all, is that in the final analysis the prosperity of the church depends upon the prosperity of the community in which it is located. In all the State there was hardly found a strong, flourishing church in a poor and permanently impoverished community. Strong churches do not take root in thin soil, and in those counties where agriculture has suffered most, churches also have suffered most. In certain extreme instances there are whole areas through which the churches have almost died out. That is to say, those churches which require a

### Variations in size of Membership. 1487 Churches.



83.2% of all Country Churches  
have membership of 100 or less.

19 Counties—

Ohio Rural Life Survey.

high standard of living have died out. Throughout the State the health of the country churches varies quite uniformly according to the degree of agricultural prosperity. The two charts, "Where Agriculture Prospers" and "Where Agriculture Suffers," illustrate this point clearly. The tendency in the prosperous communities is to maintain fewer churches, but to equip them better, and consequently in those better counties churches have fared better. In this connection we may instance the disappearance from many farming districts in Adams County of the churches of the older denominations and the substitution of churches which are built upon a low standard of living; the extreme development of the circuit system in Lawrence County; the large number of country churches which are pastorless in Washington County and the general distress of most of the country churches in Vinton and Licking counties. A Vinton County pastor, who had worked there as teacher and preacher throughout a long and active lifetime, gave an eloquent utterance of the proposition that good churches are dependent upon good farming. After describing the vicissitudes of church work in the farming districts of that county, he told of the steady decline of agriculture through the impoverishment of the soil and the rapid decrease of population. Recently ten miles of pike had been built in the county, the first good road ever made there. This pike was topped with limestone. In the summer the traffic crushed this limestone into a fine dust and the wind blew it out over the barren clay by the side of the road. Shortly after, the road was lined with a good stand of sweet clover. After describing the effects of lime upon that soil, he summed up his position by saying that in the future he would preach both the gospel of Jesus Christ and the gospel of limestone, in the assurance that unless the farmers accepted his gospel of limestone, his gospel of Jesus Christ would fail of its full effect among them. When the farm suffers, the church suffers with it. When farming prospers, the church will not be the last institution to share in that prosperity.

The various points which we have tried to establish are by no means mutually exclusive; they are all inter-related. Which is the fundamental cause it is not easy to say. Clearly, however, the gravest church problem of these counties at the present time is the problem of making efficient those churches upon which the farming population depends. This demands some fundamental reconstruction of the methods of church work and administration; a recognition of the broad, inclusive nature of the problem and a serious and scientific effort to equip the churches to adequately cope with the situation. The scientific farmer has come into all these counties and is teaching the farmers how they can make two grains of wheat grow where but one grew before.



Doubtless to his efforts must be added the effort of the scientific and conscientious community builder, who shall labor to make one church prosper where six languished before, and to this end shall attempt to unite the small, inefficient, struggling churches into larger units, so that they may provide themselves with resident pastors who shall live with them, work amongst them, study their needs and build them up by their continual ministry. And, finally, in order that this may be done, these churches must dedicate themselves to the cause of better agriculture, better living and a more evenly distributed prosperity, that there may be in the country an income which will provide for the adequate financing of the church.

## SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. It is plain from this survey that the religious problem of Ohio is the church which serves the working farmer. The farmers' churches are most difficult to maintain. They are also the most numerous. From them come the American members for city churches, for the country regions of Ohio are thoroughly American. In these churches, too, individual character is regenerated and is trained in the simplest as well as the most lasting traditions of religious life. So that the country church, resting under the detriment which is here described, is the greatest religious concern of all the churches in Ohio. That three-fourths of the farmers' churches have ceased to grow and are losing their hold upon the people is sufficient reason for redirecting the religious policies of the churches of the State to the help of the country church.

2. The tenant farmer, or "renter," constitutes a large proportion of the people on the farms in the western counties of the State, and in all the State he is a great factor in the rural population. Above all men in Ohio, unless it be the newly arrived immigrant, the tenant farmer is of concern to the church. His lease on the land is but for one year. He actually does move with great frequency. The effect of his weak hold upon the land is reflected in his state of mind. He does not expect to remain long in the community. He, therefore, does not give his allegiance to the church, unless he be sought. Among these tenant farmers the need of evangelism, of an annual, thorough-going, heart to heart preacher's appeal, is very great. Because they shift so often it is obviously necessary for the church, at least once a year, to preach a gospel of decision and of allegiance to the Master and to the Kingdom.

This work should be followed up by the organization of a Brotherhood or Farmers' Club in the church. Whatever the name of this

organization, it should be a men's society, one of whose purposes should be personal work in soliciting men to come into relations to the church and into obedience to Christ. The minister should use this society as an organ and a tool whereby his men shall win other men to the Kingdom. This farmers' club, however, should have other and sincere purposes. It should frequently hear a good speaker on farming. It should bring into the community the experts upon such topics as Co-operative Manufacture; Rural Credit Associations; Good Roads; Consolidated Schools and other things of concern to the farmer. It should be a cordial, social enterprise. Its meetings should not scorn the cheer of a cup of coffee and a sandwich. On the other hand, its meetings should always be frankly religious. They should be opened with prayer and with song. They should not, however, be prayer meetings in the common acceptance of the term. Their main purpose is to win men to allegiance to the Master and to a productive, sober, Christian life. The church ought to help the tenant to become an owner, for an owner makes a better Christian and Protestant than a tenant. The moral strain upon a family in the process of frequent removals is greater than that upon a family which stays in the community. It is morally and religiously better for a family to own farm land than not to own. All Protestant interests are bound up with personal ownership. The Protestant church is endangered in a territory in which men are passing in large numbers from farm ownership to farm tenancy. The Protestant church will be built up when men pass from tenancy into ownership.

The service of the church to the renter must be much the same as that to young people, especially to young men. It must be evangelistic, social, expressing in many ways the brotherhood and imparting by many means the diligence of Christian character. For this reason we recommend, especially, the organization of brotherhoods, farmers' clubs, men's guilds or personal work guilds in the country churches where renters are many.

3. It is obvious from this story that preachers have kept alive the churches in Ohio unto this time. Whatever has been done is plainly due to the minister who serves a church, though it be by only one sermon a month. But the rural pastor is scarcely to be found. Only six per cent. of the rural churches have a pastor's whole time. Some method must be found by Christian churches in Ohio for placing pastors in the country. We recommend the following: Let the pastor be located and a parsonage for him be erected alongside the consolidated school in the country.

# In Six Counties Where Agriculture Suffers.

378 Country Churches.

4% have Resident Pastors,  
65% have Non-Resident Ministers,  
18% are without Ministers,  
13% are entirely abandoned.

21% are Growing,  
19% are Standing Still,  
60% are Losing Ground.

*Good churches are dependent upon  
good farming. Where the farm suffers,  
the Church suffers with it.*

6 Counties.

Ohio Rural Life Survey.

The State of Ohio will, in the early future, consolidate its rural schools in a very extensive way, or at least will pass legislation such as to hasten consolidation. Already Ohio leads other States in consolidating its schools. Alongside the consolidated school will grow up a small village or hamlet, frequently far away from the railroad; its residents selected by those influences of which education will be first. The school-going habit will build up the village around the consolidated school. The church that is nearest the consolidated school will reap

# In Six Counties. Where Agriculture Prospers.

262 Country Churches

19% have Resident Pastors.  
59% have Non-Resident Pastors.  
7% are without Ministers.  
15% are definitely Abandoned.

34% are Growing.  
26% are Standing Still.  
40% are losing Ground.

*Good Churches are dependent upon  
good farming. Where the Farm prospers,  
the church will share in that prosperity*

6 Counties

Ohio Rural Life Survey.

a harvest of church-going from the seed sown by the children in going to school. Moreover, this church will have better leaders, more intelligent teachers for its Sunday school and the benefit of the noblest hopes and of the highest ideals of the community. These will become its assets and its resources. The denomination which places churches systematically alongside consolidated schools and builds parsonages for the homes of its ministers by these schools will grow in the country.

For the present this recommendation must be made to whatever church will carry it out. But in time a federation of churches might

advise the different communions which of them shall have the duty of invading a particular consolidated district. It is improbable that the number of churches so centered will ever be too many. The day of over-churching is at an end.

The rural pastor is the greatest need, and the placing of pastors in the country should be the dominating policy of religious people in Ohio. The pastor can educate his people in the religious life. He can train the children to go to church. He can accustom his flock to the regular processes of worship, of prayer and of Christian living. He can train them in giving to the great interests of the Kingdom. So clear is the message of this Survey as to the power of pastors to build churches and to maintain them, so clearly does it show the decline of the church without a pastor in the country, that there is no escape from the conclusion that in Ohio the service to be rendered by Dioceses, Conferences and Presbyteries is the locating of pastors with the people and the churches in the country.

4. The church in the open country having less than one hundred members should be inspected carefully by mission boards and Home Mission committees. This church is probably dying. The chances are against its survival. Rural population has ceased to grow in Ohio. Without a pastor the church of less than one hundred members is doomed.

When such a church, especially when a church of less than fifty members, applies for Home Mission aid to any Conference or Board or Committee, the granting of such aid should be preceded by careful examination of the field, to discover whether the church is needed in the interest of the Kingdom, whether there are other churches with a larger membership or another denomination maintaining a pastor in the community. Unless the conditions require the small church for the effective supply of gospel ministry to a needy people not otherwise served, the church of less than one hundred members should be required to give exceptional reasons before it is aided out of the Lord's money.

If this church is to be maintained because there is no adequate ministry to the community, or because there are people without the gospel in numbers, or for any other reason, the maintenance granted should support a settled pastor. His work may result in the building up of a strong church of over two hundred members; for a membership of less than two hundred in the country is unsatisfactory and unreliable. In a population diminishing in number, as the rural population of Ohio, it is not wise to devote to the maintenance of needless small churches the money which should go to the growing communities in the far





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West, or to the needy sections in counties of Ohio, where there is inadequate preaching of the gospel. In the Ohio population the resident pastor alone is the effective Christian minister.

5. We have shown that the country church in Ohio is generally too small in size. We are reminded constantly by all our friends who study the country problem that the country church is also too narrow in its sympathies,—too small in the interests it promotes. We know that wherever throughout the land the rural churches thrive and grow in size and strength, they are discovered upon close study to be enlarging and deepening the sympathies of their people. They give of their means to the great missionary interests. They cultivate the social life of their communities. They promote better farming. They champion temperance, local option or effectively oppose the saloon. The successful country churches are bearing everywhere those burdens of human sympathy which would seem to weigh them down, but are found to be a universal badge of success. The country church that travels light does not travel far. It is the small church with a mean spirit, that gives to no mission cause and contributes only to its building and its preacher,—as little as possible to the building and less than is decent to the minister,—which dies in a short time.

We recommend, therefore, to ministers and church officers that the church, of whatever denomination, must be made a center of all the interests of the community. In the language of Henry Wallace, "Unless the country church resolves that it will be a community church rather than a denominational church, it will not make very much progress. In doing community service the country church is getting back to the teachings of the Master. In building barricades from material not quarried out of the Rock of Zion to defend itself against other churches, it is getting away from the teaching of the Master and does not deserve to prosper."

# Date Due

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